

U.S. Navy Gunner Mate 2nd South Pacific Walter Joseph Lutenegger known to his Navy buddies as "Dutch" or "High-Pockets" was born in on May 26, 1920 in Burlington, Iowa. He died August 18, 1999 of liver cancer. He is survived by his wife Alice, one son Donald, two grandsons Hans and Erik, and his sister Margaret who served in the US Navy during World War II. In 1963, Walter was preceded in death by his brother Alfred who fought in Europe in the US Army.

One of his last requests was for his son to bring a portion of ashes on 60th anniversary here to the site capsizing of the USS Oklahoma on December 7, 1941. Walter's story is not unlike those sailors, marines, and soldiers that rest in silence in these hallowed grounds and seas...like his shipmates Walter Joseph Lutenegger did not plan to be brave or a hero... Like the recruiting poster...he had only joined the Navy to see the world.

After high school graduation in June 1938 Walter followed in his father's footsteps and joined the US Navy. Up on completion of his basic training at Great Lakes he was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma.

At 21 years of age aboard the USS Oklahoma on the morning December 7, 1941 Walter had just taken a shower, slipped on his underwear and spit shine shoes, then laid down on his bunk to read the Sunday newspaper waiting to go on liberty in Honolulu. A few minutes later a friend approached him for loan. Loaning his friend ten dollars Walter watched him walk away; suddenly the ship exploded where his friend was standing. An announcement was made that this was not drill, but a real attack. He sent his gun crew to get ammunition as he ran to his anti-aircraft gun. As he climbed up the side of the capsizing ship a Japanese torpedo exploded under is feet blowing him into the burning water. Kicking off his shoes he swam to the USS Maryland using a stairway he climbed up the side reaching its deck. Walter turned to see the Oklahoma begin to turn over as mooring lines snapped like a whips sweeping across the deck cutting his shipmates in half.

He began to search for a way to shoot at the enemy...in the chaos he found nothing...diving into the burning water he swam to Ford Island. In his underwear barefooted, wet covered in oil, burned, with a punctured eardrum he made his way to a U.S. Marine facility where his injuries

were treated and he was given a uniform. He and a lieutenant wanting to get into fight teamed up and found a World War I Lewis Machine gun they carried the gun and ammunition as close to the fighting as possible. Mounting the gun on a fifty-gallon oil drum Walter shot at the attacking aircraft as the lieutenant kept the ammunition coming. Japanese pilots stared into his eyes thumbing their noses and gesturing to the sailors as they circled overhead. He felt his efforts feudal as he commented quote “It’s like trying to knock down an elephant with peanuts” unquote. During a break in the fighting Walter and the lieutenant assessed their situation, to their surprise they were standing in front of fuel tanks. Given their situation he and lieutenant felt lucky to still be alive because the Japanese had not shot at them. Walter said “We got the hell out of there because the Japanese may shoot at us and the fuel tanks”...”We did not want to get killed by an exploding fuel tank”.

As quickly as the attack started it ended. Later that day and into the evening Walter manned an anti-craft gun awaiting an anticipated Japanese invasion. During the pandemonium following the attack Walter’s parents received word their son was missing in action. Three weeks later he contacted his family telling them he had been sent to the aircraft carrier USS Lexington where he served short time as a tail-gunner on a Douglas SBD-5 Dauntless. Their missions was to find and engage the Japanese fleet. However, Walter said, “We knew exactly where the Japanese fleet was located”. “We did not look for it very hard...we never did see it” “We believed we would be engaging superior forces and our planes would be shot down”. Following that brief adventure he returned to United States where he helped commission the USS Massachusetts.

Walter J. Lutenegger served his country honorably from June 1938 to October 1945. During that time he served mentioned.

His commendations include:

Purple Heart with Cluster for wounds received during the Pearl Harbor attack and Battle of Palau Islands.

Battle of Casablanca, Morocco, Invasion of Guam and numerous air attacks and combat actions.

In addition, he served the following vessels:

USS Oklahoma

USS Massachusetts

USS Tennessee

USS Solace

USS Luzon

USS Relief

Walter attended ceremonies on the 40th anniversary of the bombing; as he boarded the boat for the USS Arizona memorial he had a flashback...for those moments he felt the heat of flames, smell of burning oil., sound of airplanes, explosions, gunfire, snapping mooring lines, screams of wounded and dieing crewmate. He joyfully and tearful renewed old friendships with crewmates he thought had been killed in the attack. They to were happy to find that Walter was also alive as they reminisced about their time together on the U.S.S Oklahoma.

Walter's son, witnessed his father decades of personal hell following World War II told his mother (Walter's Wife) his sons (Walter's grandchildren) during the funeral wake, Quote, "Here lays a man in his casket the epitomizes all of the reasons why countries should not go to war. He was tortured with nightmares of the attack of Pearl Harbor which he unwitting shared with his family. " Unquote. Walter would scream out from his not so sweet dreams "Diamond Head is burning, God help me"

In Walter's closing words, "I would not have chosen to have gone through the war, nor would care to repeat it. However, I would not take a million dollars for my experiences"

By the act of spreading Walter Joseph Lutenegger's ashes on these sacred waters we pray to bring peace to his soul by laying him to rest with his shipmates.